

# MARC-ANDRÉ HAMELIN

## PIANO

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Extra

KALAMAZOO GAZETTE

### Montreal pianist Marc-Andre Hamelin wows crowd at the Gilmore Festival

Posted by Matt Steel May 08, 2008

KALAMAZOO -- The much anticipated Gilmore Festival debut of Montreal pianist Marc-Andre Hamelin did not disappoint.

What the Dalton Center Recital Hall audience at Western Michigan University witnessed was a player blessed with one of the most astonishingly clean and facile techniques imaginable, making it both a shame and a wonder that he has not been a part of the festival until now.

Hamelin chose a varied program of well known and challenging works from the Classic, Romantic and Impressionist periods. It was if he was inviting the audience to compare his playing to the best players.

Few pianists can do justice to Haydn on a Steinway grand with the composer's demands for clarity of themes and forms as well as the delicacy to dash off ornamental figurations and stay largely within a restrained dynamic range. Perhaps it was less a matter of style and more a matter of control, but Hamelin's rendition of Haydn's Sonata in B Minor, Hob. XVI:32 was convincing and more exciting than one would expect.

The excitement reached a high point in the "Finale: Presto," where he pursued a blistering tempo that would have done in the virtuosity of many of the best pianists. All the while, Hamelin maintained absolute precision in his rhythm and phrasing.

The Chopin Sonata No. 3 in B Minor, Op. 58 presented a different set of challenges in its stark contrasts between virtuosic outbursts and tender, thinly scored romantic tunes. Hamelin displayed remarkable control at the lowest dynamic levels, caressing every note of Chopin's beautiful melodies.

The second movement Scherzo had incredible drive as a result of his very ambitious tempo and meticulous articulation. The precious nature of the scant two- and three-part writing of the third movement Largo was nurtured along with the utmost care. Then, Hamelin unleashed a hitherto unheard power in the "Finale: Presto" non tanto that proved a perfect foil to the delicate third movement.

Debussy's "Preludes," book two present a dozen short musical vignettes of contemporary Parisian life. Several of the settings were inspired by vague notions such as "Brouillards" (Mists) and "Feuilles mortes" (Dead Leaves), which get expressed with Impressionistic techniques such as long-held sustaining pedal and tone clusters. Hamelin's execution of this particular piece was stylistically correct but a bit unsettling in these movements to hear him blurring over his otherwise clean, articulate technique.

Some movements such as "General Lavine-eccentric" and "La Terrasse des Audiences au Claire de Lune" (The Audience Terrace in Moonlight) are playful and understated, reminiscent of such works by Erik Satie. Here, Hamelin's natural transparent style of playing working very well.

However, he was at his best in the flashy, finger-busting final movements "Les Tierces Alternees" (Alternating Thirds) and the tour de force "Feux d'Artifice" (Fireworks), which brought the audience to its feet and inspired an encore.

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